

Chapter 6

Case Study: Honiara City Council

6.1 Context

Honiara is the capital city of Solomon Islands, a country of many islands spread over 1,450 kms from Bougainville (Papua New Guinea) in the north to Vanuatu in the south, and covering an area of some 29,000 km². At the 2009 Census, the national population was about 516,000. There are more than 70 different local languages and dialects. GDP per capita is among the lowest in the region (see Table 2.1, above).

Solomon Islands is divided into nine provinces, each centred on a main island. Honiara is located on the northern coast of the island of Guadalcanal, and surrounded by the province of the same name. It has one of the highest urban growth rates in the Pacific region, estimated at 4 per cent per year. The city's population is estimated at around 80–90,000, including perhaps 20,000 in informal settlements.

Honiara is a melting pot of the diverse ethnic groups that make up the country. There are indigenous peoples from all provinces (Malaitans being particularly numerous), expatriates and a large Chinese community. As a result, there is little genuine local identity or ownership of the city: 'although people may reside in Honiara, and may have for all their lives, their roots remain in their home village or province' (Parker 2010: 133).

Solomon Islands has experienced economic and social problems since the early 1990s. Economic growth has barely matched the increasing population. As elsewhere in the developing world, people have been attracted to the city by the prospect of employment, but there is a high rate of unemployment, especially among young people. Honiara's rapid growth has resulted in extensive squatter settlements, including some overspill into adjoining areas of Guadalcanal Province. At the same time, the growth and relative prosperity of Honiara has been a source of jealousy elsewhere in the country, with many people believing that a disproportionate share of national wealth has been expended in the national capital.

These various economic and social issues culminated in the severe ethnic tensions and fighting, which began in 1998 and escalated during 1999 and 2000, resulting in loss of life and violations of human rights, internal displacement of people, closure of major companies, severe downturn in exports and private business activities, restrictions on movement, collapse of government functions and breakdown of law and order.

Peace was restored through several initiatives, notably the intervention of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in 2003 under the auspices of the Pacific Islands Forum. This intervention combined policing and strengthening of the justice system with an ongoing programme to build the institutional capacity of national and provincial government. However, in April 2006 riots again broke out in Honiara

after the election of a new prime minister, who was perceived to be ‘in the pocket’ of sectoral economic interests. This resulted in the targeted burning of businesses in the Chinatown district. The root causes of the riots were attributed by a Commission of Inquiry to, among others, inequitable access to land, failure of government to deliver development to settlements in Honiara, inadequate service delivery and bad governance (Government of the Solomon Islands 2009: 2).

The 18 April 2006 civil unrest and riot in Honiara took place against a backdrop of infrastructure weakness and non-delivery of essential government services to the people from all over the country who, by accident or desire, have made Honiara their home. In search of a better prospect in education, health and employment, these people have settled in distinctive original provincial or island ethnic settlements in and around Honiara in near-squalor conditions, because government services were not reaching them.

High hopes and expectations of a better life compared to the rural areas from where they had migrated had not materialised, as many could not find employment. The poor access roads into the settlements, the lack of proper sewerage, water supply and electricity, high costs of school fees, lack of adequate health facilities and the high incidence of drunkenness were some of the daily woes settlement dwellers had to deal with, often with no government support. It was in the context of this daily hardship that settlement dwellers were highly vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation, and the national elections for a new Solomon Islands Parliament in early April 2006 became the catalyst for them to let out their anger and frustration against the government, in particular, and society in general (ibid: 8).

The Commission of Inquiry also concluded that, ‘there had been major failings within the Honiara City Council to coordinate, organise and deliver development in the Honiara settlements’ (ibid: 43).¹⁴ In fact, the elected council had been dissolved by the Minister for Home Affairs in 2004 and replaced by an appointed authority. This followed evidence of corruption and maladministration, reflecting in part the disruption and damage caused by the ethnic tensions.

Even earlier, in 2003, the national government had recognised the need to strengthen Honiara City Council as an essential component of the reconciliation and rebuilding process, and made a request to the Commonwealth Secretariat for technical assistance. This task was passed to the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), which then undertook an investigation and project design process resulting in the Honiara City Council Institutional Capacity Building Project. This was a five-year (2006 to 2011), broad-based technical partnership aimed at supporting the council and its stakeholders to improve institutional and basic service delivery capacity and thus to respond more effectively to the challenges of urbanisation, population growth and mounting social, economic and environmental pressures. It was funded largely by the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID).¹⁵

The goal of the project was *to bring about substantial improvements in quality of life for all citizens of the City of Honiara through sound city management, improved local services,*

planned urban development and good governance. Activities were grouped under four themes:

- Strengthened council management capacity and processes
- Improved quality and delivery of essential services
- Co-ordinated and well-planned urban development
- Good governance and local democracy

A newly elected council took office in August 2006, shortly after the project commenced. While progress was slow in the early years of the new council's term, more recently a number of major improvements in governance and service delivery have been made through both project support and the council's own efforts. Notably, the council's revenues have grown dramatically as a result of successful measures to collect a much higher proportion of available taxes, fees and charges, and to stamp out corrupt practices. If these improvements are maintained, the council will have significant capacity to make a real difference to quality of life in the city and to play a substantial role in the overall system of government.

6.2 Establishment and operation of the city council

Solomon Islands is a unitary state – a constitutional monarchy – with a national government and nine subsidiary provincial governments. Prior to independence there was a system of local government across the country, operating under the provisions of the 1964 Local Government Act. However, this system was effectively abolished in 1997 at the behest of the provinces, leaving only one town council (Noro).

Sub-national government is recognised in the Solomon Islands constitution, which requires the national parliament to make laws providing for the government of the provinces and for a Honiara City Council (but not local government elsewhere). Consistent with this requirement, the Honiara City Council was established by, and operates under, the Honiara City Act 1999 (which dissolved the former Honiara Town Council and largely, if not completely, supersedes the Local Government Act as it relates to Honiara).¹⁶ The act is administered by the Minister for Home Affairs. It makes provision for regulations to be made by the minister, and for ordinances to be made by the council and approved by the minister. The minister may also transfer additional functions under national legislation to the council, in accordance with a schedule to the act.

The act sets out the specific powers and functions of the council, but as an extension of those powers and functions also confers what might be termed a 'power of general competence' in the following terms:

21. (5) In the discharge of its functions it shall be the duty of the City Council to generally promote the health, welfare and convenience of the inhabitants of the area of its authority and to maintain order and good government in such area; and for these purposes the City Council may, within the limits of the functions so

conferred, either by its own officers or by duly appointed agents, do all such things as are necessary or desirable for the discharge of such functions.

32. (1) Subject to the preceding sections of this Part, the City Council has the power to do all things necessary or convenient to be done for, in connection with or incidental to, and may do anything which is not otherwise unlawful for, the purpose of performing its functions.

For all practical purposes the city council is equivalent to a provincial assembly. Its act is national legislation administered directly by a national minister (but of home affairs rather than provincial government). Moreover, it has a larger population and budget than all but one or two provinces, and undertakes similar functions. These include not only 'municipal' infrastructure and services provided under its act, but also significant functions 'devolved' to it (in like manner to the provinces) under other national legislation. For example, it is the 'education authority' for Honiara under the Education Act; the 'enforcement authority' and 'local authority' for Honiara under the Environmental Health Act; and is responsible for providing primary health care in Honiara under the Health Services Act. The council also nominates¹⁷ members of and provides administrative support to the Honiara Town and Country Planning Board; while the mayor nominates, and the council supports, members of the Honiara Liquor Licensing Board (again, along the same lines as provinces). The city clerk also performs various minor functions similar to those of a provincial secretary under a further range of national legislation, and has the same standing within the public service.

The council has its own revenue-raising powers (including a head tax or basic rate, property rates, business licences and fees for service), and also receives a monthly subvention from national government. It employs more than 400 staff in its service delivery operations (Parker 2010: 133). As in the provinces, most senior management positions, including the city clerk, have normally been seconded from Solomon Islands government service. However, as a result of the CLGF project and improvement in the council's revenues, this system is changing, with the employment of senior expatriate and locally engaged staff directly by the council.

As noted above, the council's affairs are overseen by the Ministry of Home Affairs. The minister must approve the council's standing orders and ordinances (including annual appropriation ordinances, incorporating the budget) – but ordinances can only be rejected if they exceed the council's legislative competence, not simply because the minister disagrees with their content. The minister prescribes the salaries and allowances to be paid to councillors, while those of the mayor are determined by the Members of Parliament (Entitlement) Commission.

The minister also has power to appoint some of the councillors and to suspend or dissolve the council if: 'it appears to the minister that a situation has arisen in which there is a failure of the administrative machinery resulting in non-compliance with the provisions of this Act' (section 52). However, the minister has otherwise limited statutory powers to intervene in the operations or governance of the council, which thus enjoys a high degree of autonomy.

The ministry's resources are severely stretched due to the breadth of its responsibilities and lack of suitably skilled and experienced staff. This tends to create a vacuum within which any questionable governance practices within the city council may not be scrutinised sufficiently, and little or no guidance is provided. Similarly, the ministry has at times lacked the necessary capacity for prompt completion of essential administrative tasks, e.g. arranging for the approval and gazettal of ordinances, including those necessary to revise and collect council rates. It also appears to have difficulty providing or supporting effective working relations between the city council and the wide range of government agencies with which it needs to collaborate from time to time.

The City Council is audited by the national Auditor General. Section 108 of the constitution appears to provide for audited reports of the council (and anyone else audited by Auditor General) to be given to the speaker for laying before parliament. However, the Honiara City Act requires only a report *to the council itself* (which must then be made public).

The council comprises 20 members – 12 elected, 4 ex officio and 4 appointed by the minister. The 12 elected councillors represent single member wards under a 'first past the post' system; the ex officio members are the premier of Guadalcanal province and the three local members of national parliament; while one of the appointed members must also be from Guadalcanal (by convention, the speaker of the provincial assembly). Elections must be held every four years. Councillors elect the mayor from among the *elected* members,¹⁸ and the minister then appoints the deputy mayor on the advice of the mayor. The mayor cannot be challenged during the first 18 months of his or her term.

The act provides for the minister, on the mayor's advice, to appoint at least seven 'standing committees'. The mayor assigns: 'executive powers, functions and responsibilities for the administration of any department of the council' (section 19(2)) to each of those committees, except that making ordinances, making and levying rates, borrowing or lending money and approving annual estimates must be handled by the full council. In consultation with the mayor, standing committees may establish further ad hoc committees.

The council must employ a chief executive officer (the city clerk) and other staff needed for the efficient discharge of its functions. It *may* also appoint a deputy chief executive. The city clerk is responsible for day-to-day management of the council's activities and implementation of policy, including control of staff. However, the act leaves the door open for councillors to become involved in staff recruitment, although this function is currently delegated to the city clerk. The act also allows the elected council to delegate responsibilities *directly* to individual staff, potentially by-passing the city clerk. These provisions could be seen to encourage undue political interference in management, and potentially to enable corrupt practices.

6.3 Review of the Honiara City Act

From the outset of the CLGF capacity building project there was recognition of the need to review some elements of the Honiara City Act. The report of the 2005 Technical Partnership Mission to Honiara noted that: 'CLGF was requested to provide

secretarial and technical support to the Committee appointed by the Minister for Home Affairs to review the Honiara City Act, 1999, and related tasks. The Committee was established soon after the Council was dissolved and the Competent Authority appointed...’ (Technical Partnership Mission 2005: 18).

The report went on to argue that action needed to be taken on a number of fronts to restore public confidence in the electoral process for the city council and to provide for good governance. It suggested, for example, that the make-up of the council should reflect the ‘provincial balance’ in the origins of Honiara residents, that there should be a special focus on participation of women and other groups in civil society (youth, business etc.), and that residential qualifications for voting should be strictly applied.

The official Terms of Reference for the Act Review Committee spelled out the issues to be addressed in similar terms:

Honiara is our national capital and as such is host to our highest law-making body, the National Parliament...The importance of Honiara cannot be over-emphasised.

The ... Honiara City Council is the government institution empowered with the public duty to promote health, welfare and development, afford convenience, and maintain order and good governance for the inhabitants of Honiara. To date, the performance of this Council over these duties has been inadequate...

The Council has been dissolved five times over the past twenty-seven years... There is clear evidence of “good governance” being compromised...

There is immediate need to review the City Act. The Act lends itself much opportunity for misrepresentation and corrupt practices...There is a strong belief that provisions in the Act (Part II) pertaining to the electoral system and qualifications for elected membership of the Council have contributed directly to the lack of quality leadership of the Council...

The Standing Committees of the Council have been prone to exercising their delegated executive powers, functions and responsibilities beyond their scopes and objects. Examples have been the improper allocation of land and the unfair and unprocedural awarding of contracts...

Audited reports and Treasury experience indicate that political interference from Councillors and the Mayor without adherence to financial instructions play a huge role in the continuous disastrous financial position of the Council...

The secondment of the City Clerk to the Council must be provided for in strong terms, such as to disable any “private” appointment of the Clerk outside of Public Service projections and appointments. This must directly relate to the independence of the Clerk in the detail administration of the Council.

The Terms of Reference thus required the committee to:

1. Review the membership and composition of the Honiara City Council
2. Review the tenure and terms of the mayor and all political representatives to the city council

3. Review the standing committee system, as applied in the city council
4. Review the representational and electoral structure and process of the city council
5. Review the qualification and disqualification criteria for membership of the city council and also review the eligibility criteria of voters in Honiara
6. Review the terms, tenure and the appointment base of the Honiara City Tender Board
7. Review the policing of Honiara City and the structuring of the police service for the city such as to be compatible with the legal chain of command in the police force¹⁹
8. Review the Honiara City financial system – inclusive of the financial instructions and the related checks and balances
9. Review the method of recruitment of the key officers of the city council
10. Draw up the tenure for this committee and insert the related expenditure budget and allowances.

Despite the strong emphasis given to reviewing the act in 2004–05, and subsequent provision of resources to facilitate this process as part of the CLGF project, little was done. Once an elected council had been returned in 2006, and progress began to be made in improving governance and operations through various project activities, the impetus to reform the act was lost. Additionally, there were differences of opinion with sections of the national public service as to how the Review Committee should proceed, and a concern that the exercise could get out of control or become so extensive as to swamp the resources available.

However, the issue was revisited by CLGF personnel and advisers in 2008, and given some further consideration in the Mid-Term Review of the CLGF project conducted in 2009. The Mid-Term Review (Sansom and Whitaker 2009: 34) noted that:

A potential third challenge is political: how to sustain recent progress in bringing about better governance and management practices within HCC [Honiara City Council] in the event of a change in Lord Mayor and reduced commitment to good governance amongst Councillors. Elections are due in August 2010 and anecdotal evidence suggests that to date few voters are aware of the improvements that have been made to HCC and the benefits that will eventually flow from maintaining current policies and practices into the medium term. There is a risk that the Project's success in helping HCC generate massive increases in revenue simply makes the council a more attractive target for those seeking personal gain through improper decisions and dealings.

There appear to be two strands to managing this challenge:

- voter education and awareness programmes in the lead-up to next year's elections, highlighting the role played by HCC and why good governance is fundamental to improved service delivery; and

- enhanced oversight by MHA [Ministry of Home Affairs] coupled with amendments to the Honiara City Act to minimise the risk and impact of poor governance, and to facilitate timely and appropriate intervention if required.

Strategies on both fronts need to be pursued more vigorously over the remainder of the Project...

An internal CLGF project document produced in late 2008 suggested a number of key areas in which the Honiara City Act should be amended to address important governance issues (Sansom 2008). It suggested that rather than pursuing a comprehensive review of the act, efforts should focus on ‘... a manageable, carefully targeted package of measures likely to gain the support of Council itself and other key stakeholders’, together with a limited consultation process.

The potential amendments canvassed in the document largely covered the same issues as those raised in 2004–05, but with some additions. These additions were notably in the areas of accountability to the community; relations with the national government; broadening representation on the council; limiting the number and discretion of standing committees; reducing the likelihood of frequent and disruptive challenges for the position of mayor; protecting the city clerk against undue political interference in day-to-day management and also against unwarranted dismissal; improved corporate planning and ‘strategic’ financial management; and strengthening ward committees as a vehicle for community engagement and ‘neighbourhood governance’. Overall, the aim was to reduce the scope for maladministration.

Suggested amendments included, for example:

- the possibility of including a ‘charter’ setting out the council’s duty to operate efficiently and effectively in the public interest and to deliver adequate and equitable services (similar to one in the New South Wales Act in Australia);
- requiring an annual report detailing the activities and achievements of the city council during the previous year;
- establishment of a Honiara City Co-ordination Committee to include the prime minister/deputy prime minister, minister for home affairs, mayor, deputy mayor, premier of Guadalcanal, and other ministers and members of parliament, as appropriate, to promote co-ordinated planning and administration of Honiara as the capital city;
- requiring an independent inquiry or independent report to the minister prior to suspension or dissolution of the council;
- removing ex officio seats on the council for members of parliament and the premier of Guadalcanal, and increasing to no more than eight the number of appointed members, with criteria for their appointment – e.g. to represent women, young people, ethnic groups that are significantly under-represented by the electoral process, persons with expertise in local government etc.;
- a limit of no more than four standing committees plus an executive committee, and removing the reference to standing committees assuming executive functions;

- a popularly-elected mayor, but with no change to current powers or to the provisions for appointment of a deputy mayor;
- prohibiting any motion to remove the mayor within six months before the due date for council elections;
- removing the elected council's power to appoint staff other than the city clerk and deputy city clerk (although the council could reasonably expect to be consulted on the appointment of senior staff), and giving the city clerk responsibility for appointing all other staff;
- providing that before the city clerk or deputy can be dismissed, the council must commission an independent report into the stated reasons for dismissal and consult the permanent secretary of the ministry;
- providing that the council may delegate powers and functions to the city clerk, who may in turn make delegations to other staff;
- requiring the budget estimates to be accompanied by a three- or four-year corporate plan that sets out the council's goals, objectives and proposed activities and achievements over that period, plus a detailed operational plan for the following financial year;
- providing that a transfer of land may not be registered if the sale or lease of land has not been properly authorised by the full elected council;
- new provisions for appointment of ward committees (e.g. number of members, nominations to be considered by the council as a whole) and their functions (e.g. advise the ward councillor and propose projects to be funded from the Ward Development Grant); and
- specifying the maximum total amount of Ward Development Grants (e.g. as a percentage of total estimated expenditures) and requiring that an equal grant be allocated to each ward.

At the time of writing, no further action had been taken to implement these or other amendments. Various discussion papers had been prepared and some specific proposals put forward, but pressure of day-to-day business, turnover in the position of city clerk, and political and legal challenges to the mayor, all caused delays. As a result, the council was still operating under an act that is clearly deficient in several important areas.

6.4 Town planning and building control

In the context of a rapidly growing and changing Pacific city, one of Honiara City Council's most important areas of responsibility relates to town planning and building control. These responsibilities generated some of the most complex and enduring challenges for the CLGF capacity building project.

Land use planning is carried out under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1996. This act is administered by the Ministry of Lands. The act

establishes a Town and Country Planning Board for the city, which is responsible for preparation of a local planning scheme and determination of development applications. The board is appointed by the minister in accordance with the advice of the council, and comprises a chairman plus between five and eight other members. The act does not specify eligibility for or categories of membership, but typically the board includes councillors, an architect, an engineer and community representatives.

The act also gives the minister extensive powers to regulate and guide the land use planning and development control system, including approving planning schemes, 'calling-in' applications for determination and determination of appeals against decisions made by the board. However, administration of the board, including staff support and payment of its operating expenses – notably members' allowances and any compensation awarded as a result of board determinations – is the responsibility of the council. This financial exposure has been a matter of ongoing concern, together with the failure of the Ministry of Lands to second sufficient and suitably qualified town planning staff to the council's Physical Planning Division, which services the board (although this failure largely reflects an absolute shortage of such professionals in Solomon Islands).

By contrast, building regulation is solely the prerogative of the council under the provisions of the Honiara Building Ordinance 1960, which now forms part of the Honiara City Act, administered by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Importantly, preparation, updating and administration of the Building Ordinance can be carried out by the council with little or no scope for ministerial intervention or power of veto, provided the council acts legally in all respects. Any required approval of changes to the ordinance and/or secondment of professional staff from the national public service to assist the council with building regulation is a matter for the Ministry of Home Affairs, not Lands.

However, most forms of development require both development and building applications, and cannot proceed without the latter. The waters are further muddied by the mixing of town planning and building control staff and functions within the council's Physical Planning Division, and by a practice of referring building as well as development applications to the Town and Country Planning Board – largely it would seem in order to gain access to the architectural and engineering expertise of board members.

Thus while the board and the city council are entirely separate legal entities, this intermeshing of appointment powers, memberships, staff, functions and matters to be taken into account in decision-making, has led to ongoing confusion about requirements for development and building approval, and the roles and responsibilities of those involved in approval processes. In particular, it is widely believed that the board is an arm of the council, and that granting of planning approval by the board (or minister) means that a development can automatically proceed.

All this creates serious weaknesses in a key area of local government administration, especially in the context of rapid urbanisation. There is limited guidance and control of development, and no platform for the more far-reaching strategic urban planning needed to address critical social, economic and environmental issues.

6.5 Lessons for effective legislation

In at least two respects Honiara City Council represents a special case in urban governance in the Pacific. First, following the disastrous effects of the ethnic tensions at the turn of the century, the council's capacity and institutional integrity has been largely rebuilt with concerted external support from the CLGF project. Second, the council operates under an atypical piece of Pacific local government legislation that gives it both a potentially strong financial base and a large degree of political and administrative autonomy in the discharge of its municipal functions.

The experience of the CLGF project has highlighted both the strengths and weaknesses of the Honiara City Act. Some of the key lessons for this research are as follows:

- Any legislation operates in a specific cultural and historical context. In the case of the Honiara City Act that includes: the complex structure and divided loyalties of ethnic groups that make up Solomon Islands population; the *wantok* system of loyalty to one's extended family, sometimes in contravention of what others might regard as ethical behaviour and good governance; some overt corruption; and the institutional damage wrought by ethnic tensions. Changing the governance culture and improving day-to-day administration of Honiara City Council's affairs proved difficult, although the previous mayor and city clerk achieved considerable success in their stated intention to root out corruption and malpractice, and may have created a platform for lasting reform.
- The broad range of revenue sources available to the council under the act facilitated action by advisers engaged under the CLGF project, which produced a massive increase in revenue that could underpin enduring expansion of the council's operations and services to the community.²⁰ However, financial management needed considerable further improvement to ensure wise use and proper administration of the substantial additional resources now available, and this required strengthening of relevant provisions of both the Honiara City Act and the Financial Management Ordinance, particularly to tighten expenditure control. A tendency remained to undertake ill-conceived and/or over-expenditure in response to political and cultural pressures. For example, some and perhaps most councillors had an expectation that they will receive payments and allowances comparable to national politicians, but this is beyond the city's financial capacity and fails to recognise the difference between local and central government systems.
- A number of provisions of the act militated against sound administration. The provisions for numerous standing and ad hoc committees, coupled with councillor allowances for attending meetings, could generate unnecessary 'work' and costs. Moreover, executive powers given to some standing committees (e.g. for land dealings) increased the scope for corruption. There was no requirement for corporate planning. The Executive Committee (chairs of standing committees) could play a stronger role in overseeing and co-ordinating the council's affairs, but currently lacks legal status. The role and powers of the mayor may need to be defined more precisely.
- The city clerk's position is somewhat ambiguous and subject to both heavy administrative demands and immense political and cultural pressure. His or

her ability to manage the council's administration without undue political interference or fear of unjust dismissal needed to be reinforced, and the relationship with the mayor clarified. Some 'protection' is provided if the city clerk is engaged under the government's preferred arrangement of secondment from the public service, but then the position can only be paid at under secretary level, which makes it difficult to attract and retain applicants of sufficient calibre. The Honiara City Act clearly allows the council to make an independent appointment, and this was used to appoint an expatriate as part of the CLGF project, but it remains to be seen whether a local appointee situated outside the public service structure could withstand the political and cultural pressures involved and uphold necessary ethical and administrative standards.

- These concerns about the status of the city clerk also reflect a lack of provisions in the legislation to provide adequate separation of roles between the political body of the council and its management, and to ensure adequate oversight by the responsible ministry (Home Affairs). In most countries there is extensive supervision of local authorities by central government agencies, with a range of options for national or provincial ministers to intervene where necessary to correct deficiencies in governance, and to set standards or benchmarks for performance. This situation does not apply to Honiara City Council, where the only legal avenue for intervention available to the minister for home affairs is to dismiss the elected council. The problem is compounded by the lack of resources in the ministry to monitor the council's activities and offer advice and guidance when required. The Mid-Term Review of the CLGF project commented as follows (Sansom and Whitaker 2009: 26):

Enhanced oversight with a capacity for specific interventions (e.g. to ensure the HCC committee system is working properly, or that there is no undue political interference in day-to-day management by the City Clerk) could bring significant benefits and help create a more stable operating environment. It is also important to acknowledge the national government's legitimate interest in the affairs of the council, given the city's strategic economic and social importance within Solomon Islands and substantial government funding of its operations.

- The act is commendable for the way in which it enables the council to play a broad role in the system of government. However, neither it nor other related acts provide a robust framework for productive working relations between the council and national government agencies in key areas of shared responsibility such as education, health and infrastructure. Again, this is due in part to the limited resources, broad range of responsibilities and somewhat peripheral position in the national government of the Ministry of Home Affairs. As noted earlier, the provinces report through a separate ministry, and although the Mayor of Honiara now sits with the provincial premiers in some inter-government meetings, the experience of the CLGF project suggests that the need to engage fully with the city council and to forge national policies for the city can be overlooked. For example, there was no clear locus of responsibility within the national government for

strategic urban planning, including implementation within Honiara of the Pacific Urban Agenda to which Solomon Islands is a signatory under the Pacific Plan.

- The provisions for appointed members of the council could offer a valuable opportunity to ensure a reasonable level of representation of women, minority or disadvantaged groups, the business sector etc., but this opportunity had not been realised to any great extent. Similarly, the arrangement for four ex officio members, including representatives of Guadalcanal Province and local members of the national parliament, did not appear to be contributing to effective inter-government relations. They rarely if ever attended council meetings, and liaison with them could probably be maintained more effectively in other ways.
- Care is needed to ensure that closely related pieces of legislation – such as those covering local government, building and planning – are well matched and provide a workable policy and regulatory framework. This is particularly important in managing urban growth and development, which as noted earlier represents perhaps the greatest challenge facing Pacific local government.